



# LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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## **Public health column for IR**

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## **Step by Step, You Can Keep Diabetes Out of Your Life**

As the Lewis and Clark County health officer, I'm well aware of the horrible impacts of diabetes. It's been a giant blip on public health's radar for decades now.

But I have a personal interest, too. A couple of years ago, I learned through routine medical tests that my blood sugar level was too high. My doctor diagnosed me as "prediabetic," which means I'm teetering on the edge of having the full-blown disease.

Unfortunately, I have plenty of company. In fact, we're in the midst of a worldwide diabetes epidemic. The International Diabetes Federation just reported that about 366 million people suffer from this incurable yet preventable disease. It kills someone every seven seconds.

That's staggering, especially considering that the prevalence of diabetes is twice what it was three decades ago – and still growing. And though the incidence rate in Montana is less than that of the nation as a whole, it has jumped from 3 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2010. That's a dangerous, sobering, and costly trend.

### **Path to Prevention**

Health officials attribute the diabetes epidemic primarily to two factors: the aging of the population and the alarming rise in obesity. None of us can do anything about the first, but we can all do something about the latter.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this country spent \$116 billion on medical care associated with diabetes in 2007. This is one of the major reasons our health-care costs are skyrocketing out of control. By taking responsibility for our own health, we not only can improve the quality of our own lives but we can improve our society as a whole.

We've all heard the steps we need to take to prevent or delay diabetes: Control our weight; eat healthy; be active; don't smoke. It's the same refrain we've heard from our mothers and doctors for many years.

A major clinical study known as the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) found that prediabetics can cut their chances of getting the disease by 58 percent if they exercise 150 minutes a week and lose just 7 percent of their body weight.

Like you, I know how hard it is to follow that advice in today's fast-paced and fast-food world. But given the serious implications of diabetes, I hope you'll strive, like I do, to make every effort to thwart it. The good news is that even small changes can lead to big rewards.

## Take Baby Steps

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) offers this advice for making lifestyle changes in baby steps:

1. **Accept that you have bad habits that you need to change.** Experts say that for people to change they must know they should and believe they can. If you still need motivation, learn more about the serious consequences of diabetes at the ADA website:  
<http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/complications/>
2. **Start with changes that are easy to make.** Pick a few changes that you feel comfortable making and that will have an impact. For example, if you eat a bowl of ice cream every night, try cutting the portion in half. Better yet, try substituting a piece of fruit. Best of all, try taking a 15-minute walk instead. Each one of these changes is a step in the right direction.
3. **Keep your goals realistic and specific.** Don't just vow to "eat healthier." Instead, for example, plan to include two pieces of fruit in your daily diet, one at breakfast and one as an afternoon snack. If you can't pass up the fast-food restaurant, plan to order a small fries and a single burger instead of a large fries and double burger with cheese. If you aren't interested in joining a gym, squeeze in a 15-minute walk each day.
4. **Practice new habits faithfully.** It takes months for new habits to become a way of life. If you're successful in making a change, reward yourself in some small way. If not, revise your goal or choose an easier one.
5. **Start the lifestyle change cycle again.** Once you've successfully incorporated a change, choose a new goal to work on. Slowly, goal by goal, you'll be eating healthier and engaging in more physical activity. You'll be at a healthier weight (even if it's not the ideal weight you dream of), and you'll be on the road to preventing or delaying type 2 diabetes.

For more information about diabetes – including risks, symptoms, diagnosis, prevention, and disease management – check out the ADA site at [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org).

To learn more about the Diabetes Prevention Program, visit the National Diabetes Information Clearing House at <http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/preventionprogram/>

If you aren't sure whether you're at risk for diabetes, or if you need help managing the disease, contact your health-care provider or the Cooperative Health Center, a component of the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department, at 443-2584.

*The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.*

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